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PRESIDENT ABOLISHES NON-CABINET MINISTRIES

1. (SBU) FYI. On March 17, President Kumaratunga abolished 13 non-Cabinet ministries by gazette notification and amalgamated their functions into Cabinet-level ministries. Two other ministries were also merged with Cabinet-level ministries. The 13 ministries that were abolished -- (Irrigation, Land Registration and Tourism Development, to give a sampling) -- were set up by PM Wickremesinghe's UNP government. This move brings the total number of non-cabinet level ministries down to 14 (there are about 30 Cabinet-level ministries). In abolishing the ministries, a press release from the Presidential Secretariat stated that the reason was to reduce

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administrative and maintenance costs. In a political sense, the move is transparently part of President Kumaratunga's and her SLFP/JVP alliance's drive to make themselves the "Mr. Clean" of Sri Lankan politics and make the UNP seem corrupt. (POL)

TORKEL PATTERSON

2. (SBU) We've got a good schedule for Torkel Patterson's Sunday-Monday visit, although several key interlocutors are, as we expected, unavailable due to campaign obligations. (DCM)

BCIS SEMINAR

3. (U) FYI - the Ambassador spoke this morning at the Bandaranaike Center for International Studies (BCIS) seminar on "The Role of the United States in South Asia." Key speakers in the two-day seminar include Rick Inderfurth and Peter Burleigh. DCM and Teresa Manlowe will be "respondents" on two of the panels tomorrow. (DCM)

VISA RECIPROCITY

4. (SBU) Our consul, Marc Williams, has been talking informally with MFA here about perhaps opening up a bit on visa reciprocity. MFA has asked us to come over for a meeting next Thursday. DCM and Marc will attend and apprise CA/VO afterwards about what might be feasible (Marc has been in regular touch with VO on the issue). (DCM)

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